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ABSTRACT

The methods of resistance and acceptance used by five female high school principals in negotiating within the predominantly male principalship culture are examined in this paper. Data were derived from analysis of the women's discourse. The paper examines cultural assumptions of feminine and masculine and critiques the positivist approaches to bureaucratic leadership. It argues that within the prevalent culture of the high school principal, women are invisible, marginalized stereotypes. Two principals denied their gender differences in order to achieve equality with men in the bureaucratic educational system. Three principals were aware of their marginalization but did not identify organizational patriarchy as the cause. They did not perceive a connection with each other by which to resist assimilation. The paper argues that women need to question organizational arrangements, to ask who defined them and who benefits from them, to engage in collective deconstruction of bureaucratic discourse, and to examine how power and gender are linked. (Contains eight references.) (LMI)

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Learning from the Outsider Within: Five Women's Discourses Within the Culture of the High School Principal

by

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The purpose of this research was to examine the methods of resistance and acceptance used by five individual women in the culture of the high school principalship. I have given these women the pseudo-names of Lucy, Fay, Tess, Betty, and Sally. The basic research question was, "What are the modes of resistance and acceptance used by these five women in negotiating within this culture?" I accomplished my research by collecting and presenting these women's discourses and then describing their methods of resistance and acceptance in a way designed to facilitate interpretation. The purpose of this study was to produce a body of discourse that may lead others to develop interpretations and understandings that are meaningful to them.

I recognized my limitations in doing this work. What Guba and Lincoln (1985) called "outcomes" and "lessons to be learned" must, by necessity, be somewhat personal. Feminist methodologies displace expectations of linearity, clear authoritative voice, and closure and assume that it is impossible to separate the structure and thematic content of thought from the historical and material conditions shaping the lives of its producers. Conclusions are personally created. As Smith (1990) stated, "We're not after the truth, but we do want to

know more about how things work, how our world is put together, how things happen to us as they do" (p. 34). Smith's statement summarizes my intent. The conclusions of this research are personally created because it is not possible to be a detached researcher, to understand voices without the insertion of self. Using language means attaching one's own meanings, and this creates a privilege by the researcher that invades all research relationships. The questions asked, as well as the meanings assigned, were determined by my own positioning as a woman high school principal within the discourse which framed this study. However, by focusing on discourse rather than on truth, and by recognizing my own involvement in the process of creating meaning, I did not expect to free myself or to presume that through self-reflection I could disengage myself from my research. As Smith (1990) pointed out, researchers exist on the same plane as those who speak with them. I am involved in the discourses which shape women in the culture of the high school principal. While I have attempted to explain others' words through my own, I have been keenly aware of my own interaction with my findings. My own discourse impacts on the meanings that I create.

It is not the purpose of this dissertation to draw positivist conclusions about relationships between women and the culture of the high school principal. In research and theory development concerning both educational and organizational analysis, positivism has had a continued privileging. Truth has developed into a procedure determined by objectified methods with controlled values. This has given researchers privileged access to meaning. Their meanings have restricted alternate discourse. The heritage of the assumptions in this kind of work has been an impediment burdening the field of organizational theory and practice and has built bureaucracy into an ideological iron cage.

Positivistic organizational analysis began with the work of Weber. Weber's bureaucracy rested on "a belief in the 'legality' of patterns of normative rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands" (Parsons, 1947, p. 328). Weber's writings defined the characteristics of bureaucracy, which included a hierarchy of controls, a division of labor, and detailed rules and regulations. Weber's work fitted the search for order, rationality, and scientific legitimacy . His work also supported the faith that the problems of humankind are able to be solved

through the process of research by social scientists. While granting the difficulty of attaining excellence in bureaucratic performance, Weber's view was that divergence from the ideal bureaucratic type was irrational and interfered with organizational efficiency. Weber's work is so pervasive that nearly all organizations are still structured around some type of bureaucracy.

Greenfield (1971) stated that organizational leadership and management theories make Weber's naturalistic, scientific, and behavioristic bias dominant by the acceptance of his theory's tenets. The official version of reality offered by bureaucracies presumes a logic built on axiomatic theories. A fundamental assumption underlying such theories is that once administrative science has discovered the rules, then the knowledge developed from these rules can be used to control the organizational environment. The basic orientation is toward control. These theories seek to identify how to manage and/or manipulate the people in an organization toward the most efficient means of reaching pre-specified ends. Yet bureaucratic discourse claims political neutrality, and by claiming to be a non-ideological instrument for efficiency, bureaucracy renders itself "ideologically invisible" (Roszak, 1969, p. 8).

In most positivist research in education, the phenomenon of gender appears to be of no concern. Consequently, the resulting research framework is largely derived from the experiences of one gender. Most scholars in organizational theory have made the assumption that scientific knowledge as gained through empirical studies is objective and can be generalized across situations and gender. This assumption is blind to the different structural positions men and women often occupy. Positivist views assume that it is possible to completely suspend any reference to men's and women's own social histories. However, as Martin and Mohanty (1986) stated, "The claim to a lack of identity or positionality is itself based on privilege, on the refusal to accept responsibility for one's implication in actual historical and social relations, or a denial that personalities exist or that they matter, the denial of one's own personal history and the claim to a total separation from it". Rationality is bounded by the individual's perceptual and information processing limitations, and these limitations are tied to historical and social relations and to present power relationships between men and women.

In order to examine genderized power relations, it may be helpful to examine cultural assumptions of feminine or masculine. According to Hearn and Parkin (1986), masculinity has been essentialized as rational, analytical, achievement-oriented, problem-solving, independent, self-reliant, and resourceful. Note that these are also terms which have defined administrative leadership as it has developed from the Weberian model.

In positivist approaches to bureaucratic leadership, the masculinist characterization is common. Historical accounts of 'great men' substantiate that the behaviors, traits, and characteristics displayed by men in formal positions of authority have become the givens of leadership. Schein (1976), in an article entitled "Think manager - think male", reported that the model of successful behavior for public life and for our leaders has been documented to be essentialized as masculine. Therefore, leadership in organizations has been historically associated with particular characteristics, such as aggressiveness, competitiveness, and independence, which are more frequently depicted as masculine rather than feminine. Feminine has been depicted as submissive, helpful, and dependent. Thus,

the perception is that men's gender and leadership roles are really the same thing, while women experience a contradiction in being both feminine and leader.

American school administrators have been responsive to positivist bureaucratic ideology. The view of educational leadership as bureaucratic rationality, supported by positivist theories of knowledge which assume and privilege universal laws of administration, has become dominant. The school organization has developed a clearly defined Weberian hierarchy of authority, even though the term "hierarchy" is not commonly used. In schools there is, however, overall acceptance and implementation of the principle of superordinate and subordinate relations which follows the assumption "that the superior, at any point in the hierarchy is able to tell his subordinates what to do, and to guide them in doing it" . For example, principals are presently regarded as instructional leaders who should tell teachers how to teach.

Bureaucratic discourse powerfully molds men and women within any organization including a school. Gender is reinforced or created and recreated in this discourse. Thus, the intersection of gender and knowledge creates women at the same time that it creates what they

know. The way women exist as women may depend on how the gender images of what it means to be a woman are bequeathed by a culture at a given time. What a high school principal does and who a high school principal is are inseparable, and the "who" is not an abstraction devoid of gender constructs. The meaning of what a high school principal is still has not been separated from the term's link to men's privilege and responsibility.

Within the prevalent culture of the high school principal, women are invisible. Data are not even available to represent them. There are no images. Women within this culture remain outsiders. Women leaders are marginalized as tokens or stereotyped as caricatures of "iron maidens." Women high school principals have difficulty wearing power because the image doesn't fit them. Similar actions performed by members of marginalized groups and members of dominant groups can be perceived very differently. Here are Betty's words:

"My first evaluation, they said, 'The perception the students have, and some of the parents, is that you're very cold and uncaring.' And I said 'O.K., that's fine. That's the first time anyone's ever told me that and I'll look at that, I'll certainly examine that, but I'll tell you some reasons that's being said.' I said, 'It's a gender issue.' I came into

this district, they were looking for a strong leader to straighten out a number of problems. For a year they were looking for this person and I believe they found it in me or a hundred people wouldn't have said that's the person for the job. So then, when I took action, there were some unpleasant decisions to make. And I don't think it was any reflection on how cold, nurturing, warm I was, I believe if it was a male in that position that they would have viewed the person as being a take charge, being assertive. And to this day I truly believe in my heart that no one would have told someone with a penis that they were cold or uncaring. They would have said, 'Good job.'"

There are strong perceptions within the dominant cultural discourse about how a woman should look or act. Pressures for gender-typed behaviors are strong; so individuals generally will conform to gender expectations. This often transforms gender-based essentialism into self-fulfilling prophesy. Gender-related behavior is attached to social expectations and hierarchies that are linked to gender. Many times when females act in ways considered inappropriate to their gender, they are further marginalized. If Betty is warm and nurturing, she would risk negative evaluation for failing to convert to the masculinist discourse of bureaucracy. If Betty is

cold, she cannot fulfill gender expectations. Betty is marginalized when she acts like a man, because she is not, yet she also risks marginalization if she acts like a woman.

Women have been added on to the organizational strata of the schools, but the school bureaucracy has not really changed. The rules by which people fit in or do not do so are still linked to gender. The discourse in the culture of the high school principal demands that these women act like men because to be feminine is to be subordinate. To be powerful is to be masculine. Resistance is sometimes there, but what exists is still domination by one gender.

The discourse expressed by these women through their conversations at times appeared to recognize their marginalization. Tess seemed acutely aware of being devalued because of her gender, and she seemed to find this disturbing. She seemed to suffer from feelings of exposure and isolation and endured hostile and patronizing behavior. Although she had full confidence in her competence, she was constantly challenged professionally, often with personal innuendo.

These are Tess' words: "[T]hey were very surprised that a female was hired. The word around the community...that one of them [female] was hired. Not only was she one of them [female], but she was also one of them [person of color], which was a double whammy for them [conservative community members]. A lot of the old power structure that was here--they have not accepted me. They will never accept a woman in a position of--I'll use the term 'power.' I don't see it as a power position. I see it as a leadership position, and I've had a very difficult time with that....But they would talk about me having candy dishes around and 'Oh, it's that woman' or having flowers around or just really ridiculous having nothing to do with leadership abilities....I'm going to be reassigned at the end of this year because the superintendent sees the community not wanting a woman in this position. Wanting a man. So they're going to reassign someone from the central office and then I'm going to be reassigned to his position and I said, "I'm not going to be reassigned. My vocation is to be a building administrator. It is not to play these ridiculous games that every day there's another rumor or a lie. My office is so bland now....I used to have a theme. There was a theme and we'd carry it over to the office. For Halloween I had skeletons

on a table cloth and 'Oh, my God, she's a witch and she's practicing witchcraft.' And this goes on and on, every month something ridiculous, and it just got to the point where I went, 'Well, I'll just make it as bland as possible.' It's really hard for me because you know you have to assert your personality. When you can't, then this is not the right place....No one should be put through this crap. And just because of your gender--that's absurd, that's absurd."

At times, all of these five women acquiesced, perhaps unintentionally, to the dominant, masculinized discourse of the culture that they inhabit. They expressed this acceptance in various ways. For example, Fay dressed in ways deemed appropriate by the dominant discourse. Sally wanted her students to assimilate the corporate norm. However, except for Sally, all discourses expressed areas of resistance, too. Betty wouldn't wear "man suits." Fay hugged her students. Tess wore flowered sneakers.

However, the discourses of Sally and, to a lesser extent of Fay, minimized the differences between men and women as high school principals. Both women's discourses seemed to view the high school principalship much as it is viewed in the dominant discourse. In most organizations gender-based divisions of labor are reinforced by

divisions of authority and power expressed through hierarchy. Hierarchical division by gender is rarely random, and the valuation of men over women is paralleled in the dominant discourse's valuation of the gender of masculine over the gender of feminine. When these women spoke in the dominant bureaucratic discourse, they were, in essence, voicing their own cultural devaluation.

In Fay's and Sally's discourses the absence of a recognition of their divergence seemed to be grounded in the oppositional structure of our society. Given birth status in a patriarchal society, males are afforded masculinist discourse privilege. Women are not afforded that privilege. People choose to be masculinized and privileged or to be femininized and not privileged. In oppositional structure, thinking in terms of gender difference denies the principle of equality. As a result, Fay and Sally denied their difference in order to be equal to men. The flaw in this thinking is that equality cannot be achieved by requiring the dissolution of one gender into the other. Fay did not think that changing the sex of the majority of high school principals would change much of what happened. Here are Fay's words: "What would be different? I don't know that I think, right off the top of my head, that anything would be different. Women have the same ideas.

Women have the same, you know, we certainly have the same intellect. We have the same motivation for kids. I don't know that anything would be different. No, I don't believe that we're all of a sudden going to have flowers and cookies at all of the League meetings because the girls' [are] in charge. I don't believe in those sexist kind of issues. But, I think that things would be the same. Maybe it would lend more credibility to those that are there."

Perhaps it is a risk for Fay to state, "Women are different and this is what it might be like." Fay may be reluctant to become identified with women's viewpoints because this may mean identification with stereotyped expectations or, in an oppositional society, may mean identification as "lesser" by being "the other." Fay's discourse apparently works for her by claiming similarity with men subjects.

Both Fay and Betty seemed to define equality as consisting of entry into the male world, with no expectations of major changes in that world. Their discourses seemed to focus largely on changing the sex of the people at the top of the educational bureaucracy. With that discourse, women might continue to support educational organizations that really promote a man's world "where men, and the

women who have entered the fray, joust and jostle for positions of dominance like stags contesting the leadership of their herd".

The discourses of Lucy, Tess, and Fay seemed to indicate that they were aware of their marginalization within the culture of the high school principal, but none identified the concept of patriarchy, as such, as an essential component of that marginalization. When the discourses of Lucy, Tess, and Fay identified the source of their marginalization, they gave the names of individual men. The men were there, concrete. For example, Lucy recognized that some men within the institution felt challenged by her application to be principal, but she did not mention the concept of organizational patriarchy. While she actually seemed to reject cognitively the idea of gender as an element of organizational discrimination, she stated that when she applied for the job of principal, an assistant principal told her that she was "taking food out of the mouth of a man's family." Lucy said, "...to them it was as if I had infringed upon something...I had stepped over a line that this is as far as you are supposed to go and if you do that...what kind of powers are you going to take away from them. It was almost, I could see it happening, I don't know how to explain it to you, but I could see from a counseling

point-of-view. I could see the struggle that went on in the minds of men to outdo me. I could see the guys working around here to make sure that they got recognition for everything that they did...." Women principals are not taught to label the abstract masculinist power in their culture as "patriarchy." Patriarchy is taken-for-granted in university preparation programs for the principalship, just as it is in the larger culture. Feminist critiques are an anomaly. Patriarchy remains unnamed most of the time, and that keeps it invisible, pervasive, and powerful.

The limitation imposed by viewing their marginalization at an individual level, rather than due to patriarchal power, may mean that these women high school principals do not perceive a connection with each other by which to resist assimilation. It seems that their practice is expected to obey the imperatives of patriarchy. As in the case of Tess, failure to do so results in further marginalization.

Some of the women in this study stated that they embraced some variation in attire according to what their activities were for a particular day. This is in contrast to men in bureaucratic positions who have made the jacket and tie into a uniform. Because of the

established social relationship between cultural definition of dress and gender division, relationships of dress within organizations are characteristically invested with a power dimension. A woman who places herself in masculinized attire could be signifying that she has accepted the male-defined organizational norms. Sally and Fay seemed to have adopted this uniform of dress. According to Tess and Betty, deviations from the traditional, conservative norm for attire were negatively evaluated by others. These women walked an appearance tightrope, balancing looking "feminine" enough so that conventional rules and expectations of gender behavior were maintained, but "businesslike" enough, or stereotypically masculine enough, so that the issue of gender difference was minimized. These women seemed to recognize that they were dressing for an audience within the culture of the organization. Tess, Betty, and, to a lesser extent, Lucy seemed to resist this culture's mandates on appearance. Fay and Sally seemed to accept it.

Here are Sally's words: "I think we have an obligation to set an image. I'm very conscious of how I look, and I feel I have an obligation to do that. I just had a thing this morning with a group of students that we're getting ready for summer internship. They said,

'I like this style, I want this style.' I said, 'I like style, too, but I don't style to come to work, I wear appropriate clothes to work. I style when I'm on my own time. You have to style when you're on your own time. When you go out in these corporations, you've got to go looking the way that they expect you to look.' They don't understand that, and I think we have to set the example. I can't say to them, 'There is a proper way to dress or what we perceive as proper,' and then come looking otherwise." Apparently, Sally did not want students in this high school to accentuate their difference from the corporate norm which embraces masculinist discourse. The emphasis still appeared to be on students developing into successfully assimilated public, masculinized people. Perhaps Sally is trying to integrate her largely African-American student population into the traditional culture of power that she seems to have assimilated. The price to pay for that assimilation may be the silencing of the students' own voices so that they may have a chance to fit high into the authority pyramid. Sally's message may be that equality is constituted by a denial of difference. This the message of traditional, "shirt and tie" bureaucracy, "sameness" is a form of domination by which to sustain society's givens of privileged masculinist discourse.

It is the position of master discourse to see everyone the same in order to accord them dignity and respect. Yet, this is an expression of domination and not a cure for it. Feminist discourses claim the goal of ending domination and not the ending of difference.

In order to fit in, Sally may have dressed and behaved "the same" or acted like a man. Sally's discourse operates in such a way as to maintain the link between women and subordination and men and domination: act like a man and be dominant, act like a woman and be subordinate. To dismantle that would be to dismantle the patriarchal system itself, and that system has rewarded Sally. In the system, gender and power coalesce; in this process, a high school principal may not necessarily be a man, but a high school principal acts like a man.

Sally is an outsider, yet the domination of the system toward sameness seems to have turned her to insider, masculinist discourse. She has learned the boundaries well, but this may have sabotaged her chances to remake and transcend them. Denying Sally difference can be oppression. Sally appears to have been silenced.

Women's silence can serve to reinforce negative stereotypes and marginalization. Unless women are heard, women can remain the

marginalized other. Silence works towards the erasure, rather than the affirmation, of difference. Sally needs to be heard. Perhaps, at some level, she knows it. "What do you do when you get here?" I asked Sally. "What's the first thing you do?"

She replied, "Scream."

Women high school principals need to be heard by creating a discourse for themselves that encompasses their differences as women. In a masculine discourse coming to know cannot be separated from relations of power between genders. These relations of power and knowledge and gender are expressed in male-dominated discourse but serve as the purposeful construction of the culture of the high school principal and of our society in general. When the link between gender and power is hidden or invisible, it is fixed and is a source of power beyond question. Silence is a voice of repression.

Viewing their marginalization at an individual level may mean that these women high school principals do not perceive a connection with each other. They need to do so. Only by connecting with each other can women resist assimilation and the temptation to be like those in control and, by doing so, claim difference. Strategies of

discourse which silence women's knowledge about the culture of the high school principal help to confirm the invisibility of women.

Women high school principals need to ask questions about what has come to be, whose interests are served by particular organizational arrangements, and from whence frames of reference come. They need to be critical of how the forces of authority affect them as they form and re-form their thinking. They need to examine whose interests are served by ideologically frozen discourses. Those women using masculinist discourses and paradigms need to consider the implications of their own position of privilege over others. Women can become enmeshed by the contradictions, difficult to reconcile, which exist between their jobs and the dominant social genderization. The structure of educational bureaucracy is still maintained by strategies of discourse which link domination and coherence while silently linking power and gender. When research does not examine power and gender, subordination is reinforced for women.

Research which intersects with people's self-understandings can provide possibilities for change. Such research can lead to self-reflection and provide the forum for possible emancipatory theory

construction. The interaction between theory construction, as such, and administrative practice will further enable people to re-evaluate their own processes and situations.

Women high school principals should retell and analyze their stories. Then conversations can be moved to more reflective action as cultural explorations are moved to explicit practices. These practices may empower the construction of a new perception which could undermine masculinist assumptions and open to question the dominant discourse. This should be done in colleges in professional preparation programs. This should be done by women high school principals in groups of their own. This should be done through publications of feminist critiques. Collective deconstruction by women high school principals is likely to threaten the entrenched terms of bureaucratic discourse and the upheaval may contribute to development of some alternatives for practice.

I do not know if I will ever be comfortable with the way I practice my feminist beliefs in my position as a high school principal. However, it is only when my practice is problematic that I am conscious of my resistance to the masculinist discourse. When women who are practicing administrators, like me, do not examine

the intersection of power and gender, when they speak in masculinist discourse, they may be more promotable within the bureaucracy, but their lack of attention to gender reinforces the dominance of the masculinist discourse. The culture of the high school principal is a rich site for cultural re-examination.

The deconstructing of the dominant discourse will require more research and more discussions that link gender to patterns of practice within the culture of the high school principal as it is grounded in the wider culture. Dominance by men is reinforced and maintained within this culture, in part, because it is a microcosm of the wider culture.

I believe that it is impossible to separate gender and power under our present cultural constructs. However, focusing on notions of gender enables a way to explore difference and a way to identify privileges and oppressions. As a feminist, I do not favor feminine gender "power-over," nor do I believe that power can be abolished altogether. However, I do favor considerations of a multivoiced equity that allows for negotiation of differences. These considerations involve seeking new options which may be, as yet, unarticulated, and perhaps even unimagined.

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